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Gov. Pritzker Joins Blackhawks and Rockford Officials to Announce \$23 Million BMO Harris Bank Center Capital Renovation

Blackhawks Announce Purchase of Rockford IceHogs; Team to Remain in Rockford Through 2036

Rockford, Il. – Governor JB Pritzker today joined the Chicago Blackhawks, the City of Rockford, and the Rockford Area Venues and Entertainment Authority (RAVE) and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) in announcing a \$23 million multi-year capital project to revitalize the BMO Harris Bank Center - Rockford's largest sports arena and entertainment venue. With support from state, local and private sector partners, the project will spur regional economic development and lay the groundwork for the acquisition of Rockford-based professional hockey team, the Rockford IceHogs, by the NHL's Chicago Blackhawks.

The City of Rockford, RAVE, the State of Illinois, and the Chicago Blackhawks are partnering to invest in building improvements to the BMO Harris Bank Center, home of the IceHogs. Fueled in part by Governor Pritzker's bipartisan Rebuild Illinois \$45 billion capital plan, the project will modernize Rockford's largest destination asset, creating over 250 construction jobs, retaining hundreds of existing full-time positions, and generating millions in economic activity to the region.

"Not only will this \$13 million investment create over 250 construction jobs, retain hundreds of existing positions at the arena, and generate tens of millions in economic activity for the region – but we're also opening the door for the Chicago Blackhawks to formally purchase their AHL affiliate, securing the IceHog's long-term presence in Rockford," **said Governor JB Pritzker.** "By leveraging our historic Rebuild Illinois capital plan, we have scored a winning combination for Illinois, for Rockford, for the Chicago Blackhawks, and for the Rockford IceHogs – and just as importantly, for all the fans who are excited to come back to the BMO to cheer on the hometown team."

“The Rockford IceHogs have played a critical role in our franchise’s success, and today, the IceHogs officially become a part of the Chicago Blackhawks family,” **said Blackhawks Chairman W. Rockwell “Rocky” Wirtz and CEO Danny Wirtz.** “Not only is this an exciting opportunity from a hockey perspective, but in partnership with the City of Rockford and the State of Illinois, we are reinvesting in Illinois to generate positive economic as well as philanthropic impact through our Chicago Blackhawks Foundation, further solidifying the team’s standing in the community.”

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) will provide \$13 million in Rebuild Illinois grant funding, acting as the foundation for an overall \$23 million in capital improvements to the 40-year-old facility. Another \$10 million includes short and long-term capital from RAVE and the City of Rockford, enabling savings from the sale of the team and other financing sources to make upgrades to the BMO Harris Bank Center.

The investment will support necessary infrastructure improvements, improved audio-visual and digital technology, enhanced guest experience and concession areas, space for sports betting, and other modernized customer amenities. Additionally, the capital plan will upgrade BMO Harris Bank Center’s back-of-house facilities

“The exciting transformation here in Rockford is a great example of how state, local and private sector partners can work together to maximize investments that will stimulate economic growth in the region and give companies and visitors just another reason to come to Illinois,” **said Sylvia Garcia, Acting Director of DCEO.** “Under Governor Pritzker’s leadership, Rebuild Illinois is propelling projects that will not only modernize our aging infrastructure, but that will bring new investment to our communities and keep our state competitive for years to come.”

“This is an exciting day for the City of Rockford! We are celebrating a stronger relationship between Rockford and the Chicago Blackhawks through two incredible announcements - a true collaborative effort to bring millions in renovations to the BMO Harris Bank Center and the sale of the IceHogs to the Blackhawks with a long-term commitment from the Blackhawks to stay in Rockford,” **said Rockford Mayor Tom McNamara.** “I want to especially thank Governor Pritzker and his team for seeing great potential in our facility and for bringing this significant investment to our community. These improvements will put us back on the map as a destination for sporting events, concerts and shows.”

“This is great news for Rockford area hockey fans and downtown businesses,” **said State Senator Steve Stadelman (D-Rockford).** “The improvements to BMO Harris Bank Center will ensure the entertainment venue remains a tourist attraction. The state continues to show its commitment to Rockford by supporting the revitalization of downtown.”

“As we make strides towards a post-pandemic normalcy, I’m excited to assist in investing over \$10M to Rockford’s largest and most iconic entertainment venue,” **said State Representative Maurice A. West (D-Rockford).** “This will help us not only to foster new memories for Rockford families, but it will also help bring a diverse field of

attractions and artists that will entertain our whole community. This is a huge win for downtown Rockford.”

“The Blackhawks are making a substantial investment not only in the IceHogs, but also in the whole Stateline,” **said State Representative Dave Vella (D-Loves Park).** “This is a strong signal to the rest of Illinois that this world class organization believes that we are on the rise. Our future is bright and I look forward to what this partnership will bring.”

“Our partnership with the Chicago Blackhawks has always been a key driver in our efforts to expand entertainment programming and to lay the groundwork for a resurgence of Rockford’s downtown district,” **said RAVE Board Chairman Craig Thomas.** “As we prepare the BMO for a strong future and this next phase of modernization, we thank the Blackhawks for their continued support, and give special thanks to Governor Pritzker and the state of Illinois for making capital investments needed today to keep the BMO and our home team competitive for the future.”

Subject to AHL approval and finalization of legal documentation, the Blackhawks will pay \$11.8 million for the purchase of the franchise. RAVE has committed \$1 million directly from the sale of the team to the building improvements. The private operator of the facility, ASM Global, will also work with RAVE to finance a portion of the BMO Harris Bank Center renovation master plan. The renovation, when combined with the sale of the team to the Blackhawks and their long-term commitment to the facility, will ultimately generate \$382 million in net spending in Rockford and retain 358 jobs over the next 15 years.

“For the past 14 years, the Rockford IceHogs have been an invaluable asset as an affiliate for the development of our players and staff at the Chicago Blackhawks,” **said President of Hockey Operations and General Manager Stan Bowman.** “We look forward to continuing to use the IceHogs as an extension of the Blackhawks to reinvigorate our roster with talent that is built from within, develop our young players and create depth throughout our system.”

Since becoming the Blackhawks AHL affiliate in 2007, 128 IceHogs players have appeared in an NHL game, 97 of which have skated with the Blackhawks. Seven coaches, including current Blackhawks Head Coach Jeremy Colliton and Assistant Coach Sheldon Brookbank, have been hired in NHL coaching roles. Overall, the investments in the team and their facilities will help grow a stronger fanbase and attract more events to the arena annually.

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